

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 7468

STADIS////////////////////////////////

FOR NEA/ARN - DRAPER

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, US, SY
SUBJECT: SYRIAN JEWRY

1. JEWISH COMMUNITY LEADER TOUTAH TOLD DCM DECEMBER 5 THAT SYRIAN SECURITY OFFICIALS CONTINUED TO BE VERY DIFFICULT REGARDING ISSUANCE OF PASSPORTS. THEY CONTINUE TO STATE THAT UNTIL PRESIDENT ASSAD RESPONDS TO REPORT REGARDING SYRIAN JEWS WHO VISITED ISRAEL DURING TRAVEL ABROAD THEY HAVE VERY LITTLE AUTHORITY IN MATTER. TOUTAH SAID THAT WITH GREAT EFFORT HE HAD PERSUADED COLONEL MESSAOUD TO GIVE PASSPORTS TO: A) A YOUNG GIRL REQUIRING MEDICAL TREATMENT AND HER MOTHER TO TRAVEL TO SWITZERLAND AND, B) MAURICE NOSSEIRI TO MAKE A BUSINESS TRIP TO EUROPE. IN BOTH CASES BOND WAS SET AT 30,000 SYRIAN POUNDS.

2. TOUTAH SAID THAT WITHIN PAST TWO WEEKS ABOUT 30 MEMBERS OF QAMISHLI COMMUNITY HAD FLED OVER BORDER TO TURKEY. SYRIAN POLICE HAD ARRESTED EIGHT OF THEIR RELATIVES IN QAMISHLI AND IMPRISONED THEM FOR FOUR DAYS BUT HAD NOT OTHERWISE MISTREATED THEM. THE EIGHT RELATIVES WERE BROUGHT TO DAMASCUS LAST WEEKEND AND INTERROGATED BY
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MESSAOUD IN TOUTAH'S PRESENCE. ALL PROFESSED INNOCENCE AND ABSENCE OF PRIOR KNOWLEDGE THAT THEIR RELATIVES WERE PLANNING TO FLEE. THEY WERE RELEASED TO TOUTAH'S CUSTODY AND HAVE NOW RETURNED TO QAMISHLI. TOUTAH SAID THIS INCIDENT AND PREVIOUS ONE REGARDING GIRLS FLEEING ALEPPO SHOWED SYRIANS WERE CONCERNED ABOUT ILLEGAL DEPARTURES BUT DID NOT WANT TO RISK MAKING INTERNATIONAL ISSUE OF IT. HE ADDED THAT

LIFE FOR SMALL QAMISHLI COMMUNITY WAS "VERY DIFFICULT."

3. DCM DELIVERED TO TOUTAH A COPY OF ALEPPO/QAMISHLI LIST OF UNMARRIED GIRLS REQUESTING THAT COMMUNITY REVIEW IT TO CONFIRM SUITABILITY OF NAMES. AFTER GLANCING DOWN LIST WHICH HE HAD NOT SEEN BEFORE TOUTAH COMMENTED THAT ITS 117 NAMES APPEARED TO REPRESENT ALL ELIGIBLE WOMEN IN QAMISHLI/ALEPPO. HE SAID HE WOULD TRY TO REDUCE IT TO LIST OF ABOUT 40. TOUTAH ALSO SAID THAT HE AND RABBI HAMRA HAD BEEN UNABLE TO FIND THEIR COPY OF THE DAMASCUS LIST. DCM SAID HE WOULD BRING TOUTAH ONE ON HIS NEXT VISIT.

4. DCM ASKED TOUTAH ABOUT STATUS OF LIST OF IRANIAN PASSPORT HOLDERS IN COMMUNITY. TOUTAH SAID IT WAS STILL BEING COMPILED. HE SAID GROUP WHICH HAD VISITED IRANIAN AMBASSADOR AT SHALOM'S INSTIGATION HAD BEEN VERY EMBARRASSED WHEN IRANIAN AMBASSADOR HAD KNOWN NOTHING ABOUT THE "PLAN."

5. FOR WHAT IT MAY BE WORTH, TOUTAH SAID THAT REACTION OF SYRIANS LIVING IN HIS QUARTER OF OLD DAMASCUS TO RECENT AREA DEVELOPMENTS WAS STRONGLY IN FAVOR OF SADAT'S INITIATIVES. HE SAID THIS INCLUDED CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM INHABITANTS AS WELL AS JEWS. (COMMENT: NOT AN UNEXPECTED REACTION FROM THIS LARGELY MERCHANT/ARTISAN DISTRICT.)

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YM WISH MAKE ONE COMMENT ON YOUR EXCELLENT HUMAN RIGHTS PAPER. YOU LIST "ABILITY TO ACQUIRE OR TRANSFER PROPERTY DEEDS AND OTHER TITLE DOCUMENTS" AS ONE OF THE RESTRICTIONS ON THE JEWISH COMMUNITY WHICH HAS BEEN LIFTED. THIS IS TRUE BUT NOT YET FULLY IN EFFECT. MEMBERS OF JEWISH COMMUNITY WISHING TO SELL REAL PROPERTY OR AN AUTOMOBILE MUST STILL OBTAIN PRIOR APPROVAL OF SECURITY SERVICES. ACCORDING TO TOUTAH, SECURITY SERVICES NORMALLY GRANT APPROVAL BUT WISH TO MONITOR POSSIBLE CASES OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS SEEKING TO LIQUIDATE THEIR ASSETS IN SYRIA.

7. COMMENT: TOUTAH APPEARS DOUBTFUL REGARDING PROSPECTS FOR THE IRANIAN PROJECT. WE BELIEVE HE WILL WANT ASSURANCES FROM US THAT ALL ARRANGEMENTS HAVE BEEN COMPLETED AND THAT IRANIAN AMBASSADOR HERE IS FULLY IN THE PICTURE AND UNDER CLEAR INSTRUCTIONS FROM TEHRAN BEFORE HE WILL ENCOURAGE COMMUNITY MEMBERS TO TRY AGAIN ON THAT ROUTE. IT WAS PROBABLY A MISTAKE FOR US TO URGE HIM TO SEND COMMUNITY MEMBERS TO IRANIAN EMBASSY AT THIS EARLY POINT. TOUTAH HAS ALSO MADE THE POINT THAT HE DOUBTS MANY WOULD WANT TO GO LIVE IN IRAN ANYHOW (I.E., WHAT ARRANGEMENTS WILL BE MADE FOR ASSURED ONWARD TRAVEL TO

U.S. OR ISRAEL?) REGARDING QAMISHLI, TOUTAH OBVIOUSLY
EXPECTS MORE ATTEMPTS TO ESCAPE ACROSS BORDER TO TURKEY.
MURPHY

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